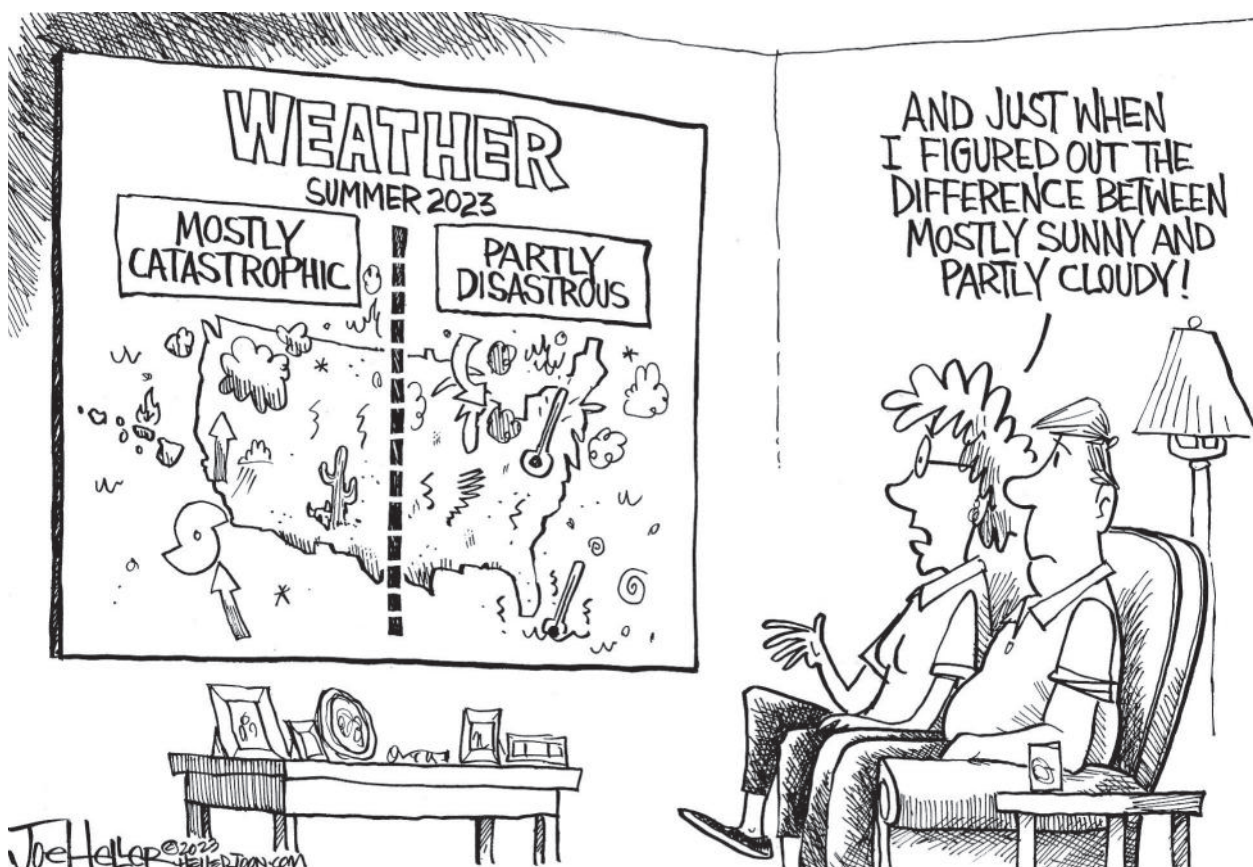


OPINION

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



JOE HELLER

EDITORIAL PALM SPRINGS DESERT SUN



Gov. Gavin Newsom, center, poses with several Palm Springs leaders on a visit to Palm Springs ahead of the arrival of Hurricane Hilary on Aug. 20. To his right are Mayor Grace Garner, City Councilwoman Lisa Middleton and Police Chief Andrew Mills. To his left are City Manager Scott Stiles, Fire Chief Paul Alvarado and an unidentified man. PROVIDED BY THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

Facing Tropical Storm Hilary, residents and leaders rose to occasion

In the wake of Tropical Storm Hilary, we offer kudos to our Coachella Valley leaders and residents for stepping up to prepare and help others through an unexpected, uncertain and frightening event.

The tropical storm dropped over 3 inches of rain across the valley, flooding low-lying desert roads and damaging numerous homes. Various cities have declared states of emergency and the complex work of rebuilding has begun.

Cathedral City was particularly hard hit: 14 seniors from a Cathedral City home care facility were among the 46 people who were rescued after a mudflow that developed late Sunday night trapping several people in cars, homes and even a train.

Things could have been much worse valleywide and a lot of public infrastructure work went into mitigating damages.

Sandbagging efforts were tremendous – communication about how and where to get sandbags ahead of time was clear and consistent.

Coachella Valley Economic Partnership provided nearly 214,000 sandbags on less than one day’s notice at no cost to Coachella Valley cities to help them meet the needs of their constituents. The amount of damage prevented by the sandbagging efforts is immeasurable.

Perhaps next time, cities can work to develop a program to help deliver sandbags to those who are not able-bodied.

Kudos to Palm Springs Mayor Grace Garner and other city leaders for harnessing Gov. Gavin Newsom’s visit ahead of the storm’s arrival to underscore the need to build the Indian Canyon Drive bridges – which will almost certainly require state support.

As we noted in a January editorial, expediting the building of two bridges over Vista Chino and Canyon Drive between Palm Springs and Desert Hot Springs is vitally important as these natural disasters will continue to happen.

Desert Sun reporter Paul Albani-Burgio reported this week that local officials across the valley have secured \$95 million in funding to widen Vista Chino and build a bridge over the wash there. As of early this year, the city reported the land had been acquired and the design work was 50% done. Still unclear, however, is when it will actually be built.

Shoutout to Caltrans for their work to get various roads up and running, particularly Interstate 10 after it closed in both directions. Both Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol stepped up swiftly to get the word out across local news outlets and social media platforms.

While the rest of the valley deserves major kudos for the relentless preparations and response to the storm, the same cannot be said for the yearly music festival, Splash House.

Though Splash House was moved indoors and they kept in contact with the city during the event with a comprehensive safety plan, the magnitude of the storm’s potential destruction had already stretched emergency responders to the limit and the fact that an event of this size continued to take place could have easily turned into a disaster.

On social media, Splash House’s account seemed to double-down in flippancy of tone for acknowledging the severity of the situation.

As one particularly obnoxious post put it: “Hilary poopoo caca, but our festivities are still untz untz ya ya (emoji happy face smirk).”

What about the countless hotel and support staff workers who had to be away from their families to keep the party going – and then had to endure getting home safely, whether by driving or public transportation, during the worst day of the storm?

Our valley weathered an historic storm and now we must work together to keep helping those whose losses are still being assessed and learn from this event how to protect our valley in the next emergency.



Student Voice
Ivana Rodriguez
Guest columnist

‘It took a storm for me to realize how much I love this valley’

I’ve never loved living in the Coachella Valley. Despite being born in the valley, I never thought of it as “my valley.” It didn’t belong to me. It belonged to the tourists, the snowbirds, the retirees, the festival goers. I saw the valley for what it really was. I was the one left behind when the weather heated up and snowbirds flew back to their luxurious nests.

I walked the deserted downtown in 120-degree heat in the summer, drove past the Polo Fields after the festival goers had reduced them to nothing but dirt and ran back to their fabulous lives in Los Angeles and San Diego.

I saw the valley in its most raw state. When the tourists left and there were no more attractions to hide it behind – I saw it for the barren desert it truly was.

And then there were the mountains.

I could never stand looking at the mountains for too long. When I was little, my chest would get tight as I would imagine the mountains closing in on me, eventually swallowing me whole. They’re impossible to escape; wherever you look in the valley, you will see the mountains.

They’re bigger than any dream I could imagine. I once read that the mountains are the reason the valley doesn’t receive the pollution from L.A. They keep the pollutants out. From my perspective, all the mountains had ever done was keep me in.

It only took a storm to completely change my perspective on the valley I refused to call home. Before Sunday, I had never seen more than drizzles that lasted maybe two hours. An inch of rain might as well have called for Noah’s Ark. But Sunday, wind shook the palm trees in my front yard to the point where they seemed to be made of rubber and the rain seemed as if it were going sideways.

I watched the desert flood. I watched my valley flood. The aftermath was worse than the storm itself. I saw barren riverbeds rushing with water. Trees that had grown with me – saplings to mature Palo Verdes, snapped in half like toothpicks. For a valley I claimed not to feel anything for, in that moment of destruction, I was feeling entirely too much.

That night I watched the sunset. The sky was so clear, almost as if it were erasing the storm in an effort to erase the damages done by it as well. There were no clouds; only the black outlines of the mountains. A ferocious red as their backdrop. They had never looked so mighty or so beautiful before. I stood in wonder at the mountains I had grown to hate. They looked like sleeping giants on their sides. Resting at our feet, preparing to protect us from whatever necessary. Pollution, tornadoes... Tropical storms. They had protected the valley from the rain I had so desperately dreamt of. All these years, they had been protecting us. Standing there at the mercy of the mountains, I apologized to them. For my years of hatred and fear – when all they had done was protect me and my valley. I realized something I should’ve always known.

I love the mountains. I love this valley. I love my home. It only took me a storm to realize it.

Ivana Rodriguez is a senior at Palm Desert High School. Her email is ivanarodriguez9@gmail.com.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Thank you to the City of Indio for your Tropical Storm Hilary help

I am so proud to be a resident of the city of Indio! Monday morning, after the storm, on my way to work, I anxiously dodged deep potholes that littered most roadways and I was concerned about the damage to my car.

On my return eight hours later, to my absolute amazement and delight, the potholes were repaired and the debris had disappeared! Thank you to all of the workers of the City of Indio who made it happen.

Gloria Velez, Indio

SEND YOUR LETTER

Email letters to letters@desertsun.com

- Letters must include the writer’s name, address and telephone number for verification
 - Letters should be fewer than 200 words
 - Letters may be edited for length, clarity and taste
- See a complete list of rules online.